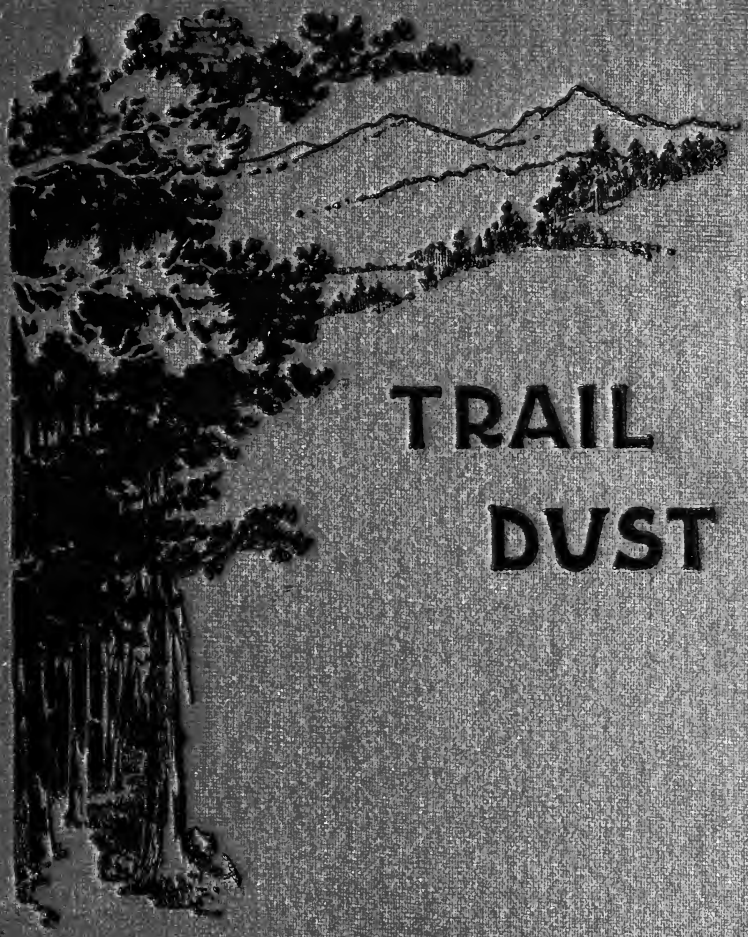

TRAIL DUST

DANIEL S. RICHARDSON

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TRAIL DUST

A Little Round-up of Western Verse

BY

DANIEL S. RICHARDSON

SAN FRANCISCO
A. M. ROBERTSON
1908

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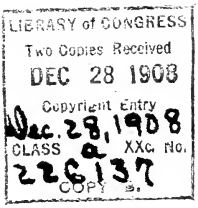

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PROMISE OF THE SIERRA	7
QUESTION	9
THE SEQUEL	11
CALIFORNIA TO THE FLEET	14
GLACIER POINT	18
"MARTHA"	21
THE MOTHER OF THE FOREST	23
PANCHITA	26
KENT AND THE MUIR WOODS	32
TWIN ROSES	34
COMING HOME	36
DEATH'S MEANING	40
A MEMORY	42
JOAQUIN	43
IN THE CAFE	47
THE CLIFF DWELLERS	48
AT ANCHOR	52
THE REDWOODS	54
LOVE'S ANNIVERSARY	56
UNDER THE HALF DOME	58
PICO	60
SHE KNOWS	64

PAGE

THE COLORADO 66
WHEREIN LIES WISDOM 70
THE LAST BUFFALO 72
PARTING 75
DONNER LAKE 77
FROM THE DEPTHS 79
SUNSET AT THE GOLDEN GATE 81
TO HER SCRAP-BOOK 82
SONG 83
SERENADE 84
THE INLAND SEA 85
YESTERDAY 87
ANDREW FURUSETH 89
YOSEMITE 91

DEDICATION

To her, in love, whose eager feet
Mine own have followed on the trail,
Up winding steep, down flower-strewn vale,
Through many a woodland, dark and sweet,
Where crooning waters hide and hail;
To her, in love, whose heart elate
Made one of sun or cloud or rain—
In joy attuned to Nature's strain—
To her these songs I dedicate.

THE PROMISE OF THE SIERRA

When I am dead and on my breast
The friendly clods are lightly pressed,
Then shall I sink from sight of men
And be as one who has not been.
E'en those who wept will cease to weep,
And I shall sleep the long, sweet sleep,
Forgotten and forgetting all—
My lot the common lot—my pall
The voiceless dark that all must know.
Nor do I grieve that this is so.
Yet, from the snow clad peaks above,
Whose every wrinkled front I love,
A whisper comes: bend low thine ear,
My wondering heart, and thou shalt hear:

Because he loved us, we will be
The guardians of his memory.
Because he loved the river's song,
The laughing brooks that leap along
Shall sing more softly as they pass
His resting place beneath the grass.
Because he loved us, flowers shall bloom
More sweetly on his nameless tomb,
And on his heart the sod shall lie
More gently as the years go by.
There is no death; love paid the debt;
Tho' moons may wane and men forget,
The mountain's heart beats on for aye;
Who truly loved us can not die.

And so I wait, nor fear the tide
That comes so swiftly on to hide
My little light. The mountains glow;
I have their promise, and I know.

QUESTION

'Twas here, sweet love, beside the stream
  Where tangled blossoms quiver,
And dainty-fingered fern leaves gleam
  Above the restless river;
Where redwood shadows fall to meet
  The golden sun tide flowing,
And all the air is still and sweet
  With wild-wood odors blowing;
'Twas here I heard thee whisper low
Thy sweet confession—trembling so.

And yet, sweet love, if we had met
  Upon some arid plain
Where birds sing not nor waters fret
  Nor cooling shadows reign;—

If on some desert, lone and rude,
I to thy feet had come,
And Nature smiled not while I wooed
And all the skies were dumb—
Speak, little heart, my doubt dispel:
Would'st thou have loved me there as well?

THE SEQUEL

My heart was light, though the skies were dumb.
"At last, sweet Dora," I said, "I come."
She lived on the windy hill.
The months had tarried since last we met;
But she had written, "I love thee yet
And watch for thy coming still."

So toward the ocean my face I turned.
The streets were silent; the gas-lights burned
And flickered in dismal way;
And e'er I knew it, I walked alone.
The air was chill and a dreary moan
Came up from the restless bay.
"Now this," I said, as the fog came down,
"Is San Francisco. No other town
Has hills so slippery, mists so brown,
Or girls like Dora May."

The house I found, and a glimmer shone
Through the blinds to the moistened stone
  Of the pavement far below.
" 'Tis from her window," I said; " 'tis clear
My love is conscious that I am near.
  She dreams of me there I know.

"She dreams, sweet child, of the June we spent—
  Of the glorious summer weather
When, through snowy azalea blooms,
  We wandered and dreamed together.
Once more I crown her with airy ferns,
  And blackberry leaves and clover;
Again we follow the river turns
  And the broken moon hangs over.
And here I stand at her window pane.
Awake, sweet dreamer, we meet again."

I rang the bell and I said to him
Of Tartar origin, standing grim
Behind the portal: "Be pleased to say
To fair Miss Dora that I would pay
  My compliments overdue."
He took my card, and his almond eye
With cunning lit as he made reply:
  "Miss Dola no shabee you.
Las' week he mally with Captain Hill,
And now he libing in Marysville."

. . . . . .

End of folly and birth of pain.
Back I crept to the night again
  And the restless sobbing bay.
"And this," I said, as the fog came down,
"Is San Francisco. No other town
Has girls so slippery, mists so brown,
  Or hills like Nob and Clay!"

CALIFORNIA TO THE FLEET

Behold, upon the yellow sands,
I wait with laurels in my hands.
The Golden Gate swings wide and there
I stand with poppies in my hair.
Come in, O ships! These happy seas
Caressed the golden argosies
Of forty-nine. They felt the keel
Of dark Ayala's pinnace steal
Across the mellow gulf and pass
Unchallenged, under Alcatraz.
Come in, O ships! The purple crown
Of Tamalpais is looking down,
And from the Contra Costa shore
Diablo leans across once more
To listen for the signal gun,
Proclaiming that a port is won.

O ships! Thou art not of the sea;
It was the land that mothered thee—
The broad, sweet land, the prairies wide,
The mine, the forge, the mountain side;
And so the rivers, hastening
Through valleys where the med'larks
sing,
Come freighted with Love's offering.
Behold, they leap the granite wall
Where far the dim Sierra call;
And lordly Shasta, from his throne,
Looks down the cañons, dark and lone,
To smile his welcome to the tide:
Come in, O ships! The Gate stands wide.

Think not we love, O squadrons gray,
Grim war's magnificent array!
'Tis not that gleaming turrets reel
Above thy decks of belted steel,

And frowning guns look down, that we
Extend glad arms and hearts to thee.
Not War we love, but Peace, and these
Are but the White Dove's argosies—
The symbols of a mighty will
No tyrant hand may use for ill;
The pledges of a nation's power,
For use alone in that dread hour
When Justice fails, and Wrong shall dare
Uplift its front in menace there.

Come in, O ships! The voyage is done.
Magellan's stormy cape is won;
And all the zones have seen thee trail
Thy glorious banners down the gale.
No stranger here to greet thee springs;
It is thine own sweet land that sings
Come in—come home; the Gate swings
wide,

Drift in upon the happy tide;
For lo, upon the yellow sands,
I wait with garlands in my hands.

GLACIER POINT

Azure glory overhead,
Underneath a gulf so dread
That the very eagles shrink
Startled from the dizzy brink.

From his eyrie, looking down,
Ice-hewn gorge and glacial crown
Sleep in primal majesty.
Mist-enshrouded, he can see

Granite vales and depths where run
Rivers leaping from the sun;
Awful shapes in stone which rear
Peaks the forked lightnings fear;

Dizzy ledges where the pine
Leans to hear the glacier whine;
Rocks on splintered rocks down-hurled
At the birth throes of a world.

O for lips—for tongue to speak—
Wings to swoop from peak to peak!
O for soul to grasp His plan
Who conceived El Capitan!—

Who conceived yon path of light,
Downward pouring from the height
Where the Grizzly makes his leap,
Half concealed, from steep to steep!—

Power to voice the awful thought
In those granite pillars wrought,
Where the Half Dome, in his pride,
Thrusts the jealous stars aside!

Idle dream! The far intent
In this power and beauty blent,
Prompts me only to confess
Here my utter nothingness.

"MARTHA"

Was it a dream, or did we sit
  In truth, one perfect day—
Just thou and I—the world forgot—
  Within an alcove gray?

The place was haunted, I recall,
  With music, and its flow
Came pulsing up from hidden aisles
  And spaces far below.

You sat beside me, sad and still,—
  Sad in the dear sweet way
Of one who feels his pulses thrill
  To music's tender sway.

And I was silent; for my heart,
Forgetful of the throng,
In dreamful bliss was drifting down
The wizard stream of song.

Perhaps it was the viol's note,
Perhaps the minor strain
Of violins which sobbed and called
Their passion and their pain.

I could not know; but when your eyes
Met mine, their depths revealed
Some sweet confession which your lips
Had artfully concealed.

Did we, in truth, sit there, dear heart,
In those sweet halls of pain?
Deny it not, for if I wake
I fain would dream again.

THE MOTHER OF THE FOREST*

A mighty specter, stripped and bare,
She stands with pallid arms in air.

Her great heart stilled—her life undone—
She cries her protest to the sun.

Man did his worst, whose vandal trace
Profaned her thus; but strength and grace

And majesty outlived the deed.
Above her ancient, towering breed

She towers still, and lifts dead hands
Above the black volcanic lands—

* This tree, a perfect specimen of the *Sequoia Gigantea,* four hundred feet high, in the Calaveras grove, was stripped of its bark for one hundred and fifty feet from the ground, to provide specimens and pin-cushions for curiosity seekers.

The sun-kissed lands which knew her birth
Back in the twilight of the earth.

Than this, man's long unworthiness
No statelier ruin will confess.

Than this, the record of his rage
For gold, reveals no sadder page.

Whose wanton lust this fane resigned
To sacrilege, wronged all mankind.

For men unborn, from age to age,
In this great shrine have heritage;

And here, from age to age, will bring,
With reverent feet, their offering.

O Mammon! Turn thy shafts aside;
With this, thy work, be satisfied.

Bid greed forego while yet remain
Some fingermarks on mount and plain

Of God's first work; for lo, mine eyes
Have seen thy trail in Paradise.

PANCHITA

The city is damp and the air is cold,
I long for the sun and a breath of the sea—
A horse, swift-footed, and liberty;—
The sweet free air and the switching flow
Of wild oats over my saddle bow;—
The long green slopes and the dark ravine,
Buckeye-scented and water fed—
Fern spray under and bough o'er head;
And the night bivouac 'mid the sea-gulls' din
Down by the shore where the tide comes in.
San Luis Obispo besides the sea!
Bare and brown 'neath the summer's sun,
Glad and green when the storms are done—
Green forever in memory.

Here Panchita, my love, I knew.
Not a flower that dared to be,—
Mountain blossom or bud that grew,
Wind-bewildered beside the sea,
Half so timidly sweet as she.
Nimble footed as mountain quail,
Light and airy as winds that blow
Summer's whisperings to and fro,—
This Panchita, this love of mine,
Dark and wistful and warm as wine,
Set the wilderness all aglow.

She was timid, I said, and shy:
Once, however, when all the sky
Burned with summer, and on the plain
Cattle perished because the sun
Licked the water-ways, all undone,
Fever-stricken, nor succor near,

She, my timid one, laughed at fear;
Laughed at danger and death and stood
O'er my pallet through days of pain,—
Called the flickering life spark back
Into vigor and hope again.
Did I love her? God knows, and He
Knows the riddle of destiny.

Sternly scornful, her father said,
"Child nor chattel of mine shall wed
Northern vandal; the grave were better."
So I left him and one dark night
Led two mustangs beneath the wall
Where Panchita, arrayed for flight,
Heard and answered my signal call.

O that ride 'neath a broken moon!
The spur of danger, the quick caress,
The hope, the promise, and all too soon
The utter shadow and bitterness!

We reached the river; the stream was up;
The current was swift and black;
But a hundred times my mustangs' feet
Had threaded the ford and back;
So we urged them in, nor dreamed that death
Lurked under the cataract.

How it happened I can not tell;
I only know that her mustang fell,
And when I struggled to reach her side,
Her horse went down in the swirling tide.
Wild with terror, I spurred my way
Down the current and called her name—

Knew no danger in my dismay—
Groped and stumbled and tried to pray—
But no answer—the cruel tide
Tossed my impotent arm aside—
Whelmed me over and bore me back
Where the willows stood grim and black
In the shallows. The long night through,
Dazed with anguish, I searched the shore,
Groped and stumbled and dared anew
Swirl and eddy and sullen roar.
Then 'mid tangle of sand and drift,
Down where the treacherous currents shift,
Morning found me, and lying there,
Pale and beautiful by the sea,
My Panchita was waiting me.

. . . . .

The city is damp and the air is chill;
I long for the sun and a breath of the sea;

But a little mound where the sea-gulls scold,
And the checkered cliffs rise dark and bold,
Hides all my summer—hides love and sun—
Down by the shore where the white tides run.

KENT AND THE MUIR WOODS

It is not oft, I think, that one
Who truly loves his kind
May do the thing which he has done
And giving, leave behind
So sweet a thought—a legacy
Perennial as the call
Of limpid waters, babbling where
His redwood shadows fall.

But more than love he gave who stript
His act of pride and name,
Transferring to another's brow
The laurel wreath of fame.
A gracious act, methinks, to share
With Nature's gentlest son
The glory of this peerless gift
From greed and havoc won.

A man it was who acted here—
  Within whose generous breast
The passion burns—the chivalry—
  The bigness of the West.
And while his redwoods drip with mist
  And winds blow from the sea,
The names of Kent and Muir will live
  In blessed memory.

TWIN ROSES

My rose tree, by the rude winds blown,
Snapped at its base and bowed its head;
I found its glorious blossoms strewn
And, in my grieving, thought it dead.
But feebly to the parent stock
It clung, held by a slender thread.

I bound the wound and braced it strong
Against the wall to give it heart,
And lo, it bloomed the summer long,
And gave no sign of inward smart;
And then, its sweet task all complete,
It drooped and faded at my feet.

So she, my loved one, died; her face
  Illumined still with life's sweet glow—
Her brave eyes veiled, lest love should trace
  The awful wound concealed below.
Twin flower, she breathed her life away,
  (My rose tree and my love were one)
With every bloom in sweet array
  And all her petals to the sun.

COMING HOME

Tell me something, you who know,
Have you ever felt the thrill—
Homeward speeding through the snow—
Truckee—westward, down the hill?
Do you know that hammer stroke
Somewhere underneath the vest,
When the ties begin to smoke
As she plunges to the west?

Far aback the deserts lie—
Splintered rock and canyon brink—
Dreary wastes of alkali,
Sage and sand and Humboldt Sink.
All have vanished!—home draws near;
We have crossed the great divide;
We are speeding with a cheer
Down the home-stretch to the tide.

O, the wildness of the way!
O, the call of bird and stream!
O, the lights and shades that play
Where the winding rivers gleam!
Throw her open! Donner Lake
Slumbers in the cup below;
All the pine-trees are awake
Shouting to us as we go.

Don't you see the fern-tips there
Where the bank is lush and green?
Can't you see the poppies flare
Through the manzanita screen?
Throw her open! From the wall
Nod the lilies as we pass,
And a thousand wild things call
From the shadows in the grass.

Whoop! She shivers on the rail;
How the cañons laugh and roar
When she hits the curving trail
Tipping downward to the shore!
Far below the valley sleeps,
Warm and tender; I can see
Where the Sacramento creeps
Willow-bordered to the sea.

O I know that sunny land;
I can hear the med'larks call;
I can see the oak trees stand
Where the wheat grows rank and tall.
Give her headway! When a son
Rushes to his mother's heart—
All his toil and wandering done
And her loving arms apart,

Nothing matters. Give her steam!
Sun and wind and skies conspire.
Love to him is not a dream
Who has touched the heart's desire.
Love to him new meaning brings
Who has felt his bosom thrill
When across the line she swings,
Truckee—westward, down the hill.

DEATH'S MEANING

If she were dead, and I should stand
Some night alone within the fields
Where we were wont to stray,—
And from the hills should come a breath
Of tar-weed with the dew;—if she
Were dead, and I should see the moon
Come o'er the mountain top and hear
The call of crickets in the grass;—
Ah me! if she were dead, methinks
That I could throw myself along
The sod and call to her, and she
Would come, though dead, to comfort me.

But if some night, all desolate,
I stood beneath the stars we loved,
And from the south a wind should blow
Against my cheek, and to my ear
Should whisper Love is dead,—
Then should I know the chilling breath,
The darkness and the sting of death.

A MEMORY

'Twas such a night as this, sweet love,
The moon was in the west,
And timid stars hung then, as now,
Along Diablo's crest;
Just there you stood—love in your eyes—
A rosebud at your breast.

How soft the air! How sweet the sound
Of crickets, faint and shrill,
Came with the breath of dew-soaked leaves
And tar-weed from the hill!
And where the river ran below,
To-night he sings there still.

O cruel Night! O faithless stars!
How can ye shine so fair?
How can the heedless river run
To wanton music there,
When she who taught the night to sing
Comes not to heed or care?

Forget thy spell, O mystic hour;
Laugh not, sweet winds that blow;
And you, ye careless waters, sing
More softly where ye flow;
For she comes not, who sang that night
And loved me, long ago.

JOAQUIN

Alone upon the "Heights" he stands
And looks across the happy lands.
With brave old eyes he looks and sees
The shimmer on his sun-down seas;
The gleam on plain and peak and snow
Where far his dim Sierras glow.
Those peaks he sung when Fremont stood
Beside him in the solitude;
Those plains he loved when Marshall drew
  Their golden secret from the hills,
That land he loved when old was new,
  And all her ways and winding rills
Were musical because one day
His truant feet had passed that way.

Gray poet of a day and shore
The heedless world will know no more—
'Tis meet that thou shouldst take thy rest
Upon the mountain's sky-touched crest,
And from thy crag serenely wait
What call may come of time or fate.
No fear I read in those calm eyes;
Who bravely lives as bravely dies.
Dies, did I say? Not that—not so—
Who sets the hearts of men aglow
With one true song knows naught of death.
He lives eternal as the breath
Of fadeless spring—of flower and sea
That trembled to his minstrelsy.

Good-night, old singer. I descry
Thy tree-built cross against the sky;
And, standing in the vale below,
Where roses bloom and peach trees blow,

I watch the purple twilight creep
O'er field and wood and shaggy steep.
Good-night, old bard; the shadows fall
And stars across thy mountain wall
Are looking over to the west.
Good-night, old singer, take thy rest!

IN THE CAFÉ

Just there she sat, her dainty hand
  Upon the railing pressed;
And I can see and almost smell
  The rosebud at her breast;—

Can see the downcast troubled eyes
  Which sought the distant bay,
Where Alcatraz and Tamalpais
  In dreamful splendor lay.

O blessed vision—thoughts that burn!
  The twilight shadows fall,
And where she sat, a vacant chair
  Is tilted to the wall.

THE CLIFF DWELLERS

Downward from the great plateau,
Where the Painted Desert creeps,
Breaks a cañon, deep and lone,
Where a ruined city sleeps.
Not such city as ye know
Where the noonday splendor falls,
But dark eyries, row on row,
Swallow-nested in the walls.

If it had a name, no man
Ventures now to speak the word;
Where its history began
None may say, for none have heard.
Yet it was a dwelling place;
Here men lived and loved and died;
This was home to some lost race;
Here was crib and fireside.

In this cañon, once aflare
With the joy of life and hope,
Slinks the gaunt coyote where
Hearth-stones crowned the rocky slope.
Lizards flash from bank to bank,
And the stealthy rattler crawls
Where the chaparral grows rank
Over stones and crumbling walls.

Written in these stones I see
Pass again in long review
Life's pathetic tragedy—
Man's old story, ever new;
Records of a savage day
When the right to live was gauged
By his strength who stood at bay
In the sleepless conflict waged.

Oh, the pathos written here
In these long deserted cells!
Oh, the tale of toil and fear
Which their mute persistence tells!
What the story? Did the sun
Dry their springs and parch their lips?
Did relentless famine run
Through their ranks in dire eclipse?

Did the fierce Apache sweep
From the heights—a human flood—
Charging down the rocky steep
In an ecstacy of blood?
Did the pestilence at noon
Stalk unstayed and taint the air?
Did they, 'neath a dying moon,
Curse their gods in their despair?

Who shall answer? From the past
Comes no voice. The great round sun
Swings in silence, and the stars
Keep their counsels where they run.
Nothing but these crumbling stones
In the desert, stark and gray,
Tell of them who struggled here,
Made their fight and passed away.

AT ANCHOR

Night and silence! O such a night—
With a broken moon on high—
And lights atwinkle along the shore
And stars in the far clear sky!

Night and silence! And lying there
Just under the mountain wall,
The great ship strains at her anchor chains
And the shadows cover all.

O patient stars! We have waited long
The coming of this sweet day.
How fares our love, in the shadows there,
Where the ships at anchor lay?

How fares our love? Does she know we
watch
And wait on the other shore?
Does she feel and answer and understand
Love's passion forevermore?

Go touch her eyes with the lotus wand—
Go softly and kiss her hair;
Steal into her dreaming soul and make
Love's watcher an altar there.

And morn will break over Tamalpais.
Sleep, dearest, the day draws near;
And love will wait by the Golden Gate
Till the shadows disappear.

THE REDWOODS

Like tufted arrows, straight and tall,
Down-hurled by some titanic hand,
Against the purple sky they stand
And tremble on the mountain wall.

From gulfs where limpid waters cry,
From deep ravine and fern-lined cup,
They lift their shafts of glory up
To touch the glory of the sky.

In fadeless verdure, host on host,
They flank the meadows, cool and wide,
They dip their fingers in the tide
And run along the golden coast.

They run from cape to cape and free
  Their pungent breath on every gale;
  They lean where winding rivers trail
Their scented currents to the sea.

Hoarse, where they stand, the west wind springs
  Along their giant pipes and lo,
  Aeolian symphonies outflow
And all the fragrant woodland sings.

O temples, reared of mist and sun,
  To crown the glory of the hills,
  Perennial joy thy beauty thrills,
And all thy aisles to music run.

The night is here; and stars again
  Look through thy arches to the sea;
  Where God so moves in majesty,
What hand shall mar, what lip profane?

LOVE'S ANNIVERSARY

Once more 'tis here, O day of days!
  Again sweet Mother Earth
Has swung her patient round since love
  On this glad day had birth.

Again the crooning waters call,
  Again the cliffs arise;
Again the splendor and the spell
  Of that sweet Paradise!

Again a happy face upturned
  Is cut against the blue,
And love is in the air and life
  And joy and hope—and you.

My heart is full; my cup runs o'er;
Love's harvest hath no tare,
And June's sweet cycle brings no fear
Of loss or pain or care.

For all is mine that men have known
Of bliss beneath the sun;
And all the stars are true, and all
My ways to music run.

And so, beneath the bended sky,
Out here where winds caress,
And birds and blooms and waters speak
Of love's old tenderness

I build an altar and I place
Upon its lintel rude
The simple tribute of a heart
That aches with gratitude.

UNDER THE HALF DOME

Low lying and all reverent,
I fling me to the sod
And read upon these awful cliffs
The finger marks of God.

The spirit of the world dwells here;
And sweet it comes to me
That she I love hath kinship with
Its brooding mystery.

I feel her in the water's rush,
I hear her in the sigh
Of winds which move among the pines,
I see her in the sky.

The stars her sisters are which wait
  Upon the mountain's brow
To watch her coming as I wait
  And watch her coming now.

O love, my own! Thou are a part
  Of this sweet wilderness,
And loving it because I must,
  How can I love thee less?

PICO*

Last of thy gallant race, farewell!
When darkness on his eyelids fell
The chain was snapped—the tale was told
That linked the new world to the old;—
The new world of our happy day
To those brave times which fade away
In memories of flocks and fells,
Of lowing herds and mission bells.
He linked us to the times which wrote
Vallejo, Sutter, Stockton, Sloat,

* Major Jose Ramon Pico, said to be the last of the name of a family prominently identified with the early history of California, died in Alameda, February 1st, 1905, aged seventy-eight years.

Upon their banners—times which knew
The cowled Franciscan, and the gray
Old hero priest of Monterey.

In his proud eye one saw again
The chivalry of ancient Spain;
The grace of speech, the gallant air,
The readiness to do and dare.
And he was ready; and his hand
For love of this, his motherland,
Was quick to strike and strong to lead;
He served her in her hour of need
And, loving, served her as he knew.
What better proof, though unconfessed,
Than these old scars upon his breast?

Once these broad fields which slope away
Asleep in verdure, zone on zone,
With countless herds, were all his own.

Once from his white ancestral hall,
A lavish welcome ran to all.
To-day the land which gave him birth
Allots him but a plot of earth—
A tomb where winter roses creep
On Santa Clara's crumbling wall;
Fit place, perhaps, for one to sleep
Who knew and loved her best of all.

So ends in rest life's fitful day.
He saw an era pass away.
He touched the morning and the noon
Of that sweet time which, all too soon,
To twilight hastened when the call
Of Fremont from her mountain wall
Provoked the golden land to leap
New-vestured from her age-long sleep.

The train moves on. No hand may stay
The onward march of destiny;
But from her valleys, rich in grain,
From mountain slope and poppied plain
A sigh is heard—his deeds they tell,
And, sighing, hail and call farewell.

SHE KNOWS.

Why do the winds so gently play,
Forgetful of their old rude way,
About my paths this blissful day?
She knows.

Why do the dull gray fogbanks seem
Like clouds of incense o'er a stream,
Touched by the morning's rosy beam?
She knows.

Why do the noises from the street,
The tramp and tread of busy feet,
Come to my ears like music sweet?
She knows.

Why does the whole world seem so fair?
What magic touch is in the air
To sweeten toil and banish care?
She knows.

Ah yes! She knows—my love, my pride—
By love are all things glorified;
'T is night or day as she decide—
My love, my own.

THE COLORADO

Lawless river! In thy run
From the mesas of the sun
Downward to the Yuman sea,
Thou hast blazoned wide a trail
Of innate depravity.

Not content to flow along
With a ripple and a song
As a normal river should,—
Spreading verdure through the land,
Sowing blessings on each hand,
Toiling for the common good—
Thou art, rather, best content
When on wanton mischief bent.

Roaring through deep cañons where
Not the sun himself may dare
Trace thy windings, thou dost bore
Through the adamantine floor
Of the cosmos, biting out
Clefts so deep and gulfs so dread
That the very birds o'erhead
Hesitate before they leap
Outward from the painted steep.

Giving nothing, taking all,
Thou dost drain the mountain wall
On each side, until thy course,
From its delta to its source,
Marks a desert, fierce and bare,—
Haunt of death and red despair;—
Sepulcher of whited bones—
Blasted things the Sun God owns;
And thou laughest. Thou art glad,

Seeing all about thee mad
In the blister of the sun—
Crying water—finding none.

Demon river! In thy pride,
Thrusting rocks and hills aside,
Tearing up a continent,
In thy ruthless discontent,
Lo, thy hour has struck, for now
Comes a mightier than thou!

When, intent on wreck and ravage,
Like a predatory savage,
Thou didst leap thy banks and double
Backward in thy search for trouble:
When the Salton Sea was calling
And thy gambollings appalling
Menaced all the fertile plain,
Then, across thy path of evil

Stepped a pigmy with a shovel,
And the roaring red Goliath
Found his David once again.

Great thou art, O lawless river!
Vast thy power and brave thy plan;
But, however great thy greatness,
Greater still is puny man.

WHEREIN LIES WISDOM

'T was a little thing—but a flower—I asked,
That lay on my dear one's breast;
But she gave it not, and I caught no thrill
From the little hand I pressed.

'T was a little thing—but a smile—I sought,
As we stood in the twilight sweet;
But she gave it not, and her lips were dumb
As the roses at our feet.

'T was a little thing—but a kiss—I craved,
As we watched the daylight die;
But she gave it not, and her eyes were cold
As the stars are in the sky.

O heart, I cried, when the night came down
To cover my grief and me,
Wherein lies wisdom when love wins scorn—
Devotion inconstancy?

THE LAST BUFFALO

(A captive in Golden Gate Park.)

Lone survivor of thy race,
Thou hast reached the stopping-place;
This is where the sun goes down.
Better so; for when a king
Passes to his final rest,
From the headlands he should sing,
Fronting bravely to the west.

Grim and silent, standing there
In the sunlight, one may see
Pathos in thy dignity:
In thy sullen eyes may read
Menace yet and threat to find
Vengeance for thy slaughtered kind.
Regal still, though all undone,
I salute thee, Shaggy One.

Yet, grim warrior, e'er thy day
Fades away in endless night,
I would venture, if I may,
That the slaughter lust was right.
True, the prairies stretch away,
Cold and silent with thy dead;
True, alas! the verdant slopes
Feel no more their myriad tread;
All are gone; but have you thought,
Grave avenger, in your plight,
How much joy the slaughter brought—
What a pean of delight
Rose to heaven with every groan—
Kindled quick by stab and sting—
How the music of their moan
Made the wilderness to sing?

Man lives not by bread alone;
He must see things bleed and die.
Were it not a worthy fate
Such a need to satisfy?
Think it out, O surly king,
Ere you pass into the night;
Death means naught to man or beast
If he keeps his logic right.

Get you to the hay-rick there;
Make the most of life's brief span;
Paw the ground and kick the air,
Or kill your keeper, if you can.
Only this before you go:
Soon or late or slow or fast,
Let the world's last buffalo
Be a monarch to the last!

PARTING

Day follows day, and quickly nears
The hour when we must part;
Draw closer, love, once more conceal
Thy face against my heart.
Once more about my bended neck
The beauteous arms enfold;
Come closer, love, for love is short—
The night is growing old.

Come closer, love; the night grows chill;
Once more to mine upturn
The glory of those soul-lit eyes
On which love's kisses burn.
Time flies, sweetheart, and love is short;
O nestle close to-night;
The morrow comes full soon—the fear,
The heartache and the blight.

Come closer, love; each listening star
In heaven heard thy vow;
The clouds, the winds, the whispering trees
Bear love's sweet witness now.
And morn will break on some fair isle,
God knoweth where and when;
But God is good, and lo, His dove
Will find its ark again!

DONNER LAKE*

So fair thou art—so still and deep—
  Half hidden in thy granite cup,
  From depths of crystal smiling up
As smiles a woman in her sleep!

The pine trees whisper where they lean
  Above thy tide; and, mirrored there
  The purple peaks their bosoms bare,
Reflected in thy silver sheen.

So fair thou art! And yet there dwells
  Within thy sylvan solitudes
  A memory which darkling broods
And all thy witchery dispels.

*The Donner party of immigrants, storm-bound here in the winter of 1846-7, lost thirty-five out of its eighty members by suffering and starvation.

For men died here; and thou didst see
Wan eyes upturned to heaven in prayer;
And thou didst smile while black despair
Unrolled its awful tragedy.

Come down, O Night; thy mantle throw
O'er haunted lake and spectral glen,
For lo, their spirits walk again
Who found their graves here long ago!

FROM THE DEPTHS

Thy love, I sometimes think, is like
The faint, uncertain ray
Of some pale star that shines afar
Beyond the gates of day.
Serene, unmoved, my eager eyes
Seek out its depths in vain
For some dear grace, some answering trace,
Of passion or of pain.
And I have called across the waste
For warmth and light, but thou,
Forevermore on that far shore,
Art coldly mute as now.

Oh, I have thought, in my despair,
T'were better to be driven
A meteor flashed—a planet dashed
Across the bars of heaven—

To burst in one wild rout of light
  Against dawn's purpling gate,
And then to sink beneath the brink,
  Than thus to watch and wait.

Shine out, O star! The pathless void
  Is dark and deep and cold;
Not Love himself may pass the gulf
  Unless thy promise hold.
Shine forth in fervor like the sun—
  Love's fateful purpose fill;—
Or love me or obliterate,
  And bid my heart be still.

SUNSET AT THE GOLDEN GATE

The sun sinks low and his crimson locks
Trail after him down the west;
They weave the sky into trembling bars
Just over the ocean's crest;
They build the clouds into golden harps
Where the day has gone to rest.

I think, sweet spirit, a shadow hand
Is touching the burning strings,
For music out from the silence falls
Like the pulse of happy wings.
Perhaps 't was the angel Israfel
And the choir of heaven that sings.

TO HER SCRAP-BOOK

Thy soul from out this little book
Shines forth as shines the ray
Of some pure star that trembling hangs
Against the gates of day.
Amid the sheaves—thy garnered grains—
Of wisdom, sweet and rare,
I drop the tribute of a song
And leave it humbly there.
May He who notes the sparrow's fall
Make thee His ward and care.

SONG

The day grows late and shadows creep
  Across yon rosy reach of sea;
Night comes again, but ah! no more
  My loves comes back to me!

Night comes again—the same sweet stars—
  The same sweet spell on sea and shore;
But she who tuned the night to song
  Comes back no more, comes back no more!

SERENADE

Night is with thee, beauteous one,
  Slumber's kiss is on thy brow;
In thy dreaming canst thou know
  Who so fondly calls thee now?

Sleep, sweet dreamer; would that I
  From thine eyes might kiss away
All their sorrow, as the night
  Kisses back the cares of day.

Sleep, sweet dreamer; I will watch.
  Morn will come; but not to me
Comes the rapture of the dawn
  Till thy waking eyes I see.

THE INLAND SEA

Sea of beauty! Never yet
Subtle words to music set
Told thy magic. Thou art part
Of a vision, half revealed,
Felt, but evermore concealed.

I have seen thee when the day
On thy isles in splendor lay;
I have seen thee when the night
Bended o'er thee, and the moon,
In thy silver depths a-swoon,
Lost her way, and stillness deep
Dwelt on stream and templed steep.

Morning breaks; and lo, a star,
Pale and pure as lilies are,
Smiles upon thee. Fuji there
Lifts his lordly brow in air,
Hails thee from his battlement—
Sees thy face and is content.

YESTERDAY

One summer time my tent was pitched
  Within a forest glade
Where shy birds whistled to the stream
  And tangled blossoms swayed.
About it sweet azaleas clung,
  Complaining bees flew over,
And sweet upon the air there hung
  A breath of pine and clover.

At night the great black mountains threw
  Their shadows on the river,
And, where the listening pines looked through,
  The stars were all a-quiver.
I do not know—I was not sure
  The river was complaining;
But all night long he called to me
  While stars and moon were waning.

And all night long a minor strain—
  An under note of sadness—
Ran through the music of the trees
  And stole away their gladness.
It may be that the mountains knew:
  And something of their splendor
The grieving stars, perchance, withdrew
  In recollection tender.

It may be, also, that the stream,
  By reverie o'ertaken,
Was calling back some old sweet dream
  Of love and faith forsaken;
Some dream, perchance, of her who stood
  Beside me in the never
Of that lost yesterday, whose wraith
  Dwells in these groves forever.

ANDREW FURUSETH

Not his, perhaps, the grace of mien
  Which culture yields and schools bestow;
  Not his the studied art to throw
Delusive lights upon the screen.

A plain, strong man—he makes his fight
  Along the ramparts, armed alone
  With sense of wrong—the people's moan—
The pathos of their plea for right.

Within his grave, sad eyes I read—
  More potent than the passing hour
  Of greed and arrogance and power—
The measure of a brother's need.

And right will win; while yet are given
Stout hearts, like his, to do and dare,
No cause will faint or slave despair
Who gropes through darkness up to heaven.

YOSEMITE

In this deep cleft, so set apart—
So close to Nature's throbbing heart—
I stand in fear,
For God is near.

With wondering eyes, from dizzy trails,
I look on floods and granite vales,
And in them see
Divinity.

From towering cliffs and ice-hewn crown
The arrow-feathered pines look down
Where God alone
Has set His throne.

Be still my soul; the Presence greet.
Unclasp the sandals from thy feet,
For all around—
'Tis holy ground.

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